

Story 1077 1980 Tape 1

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The Fallacy of Self-Sacrifice

Once there was and once there wasn't, when it was a sin to say, "There is nothing," and there was nobody but God.<sup>1</sup> Well, back in those days there were a mother and her son. They were quite rich. The boy's father had been dead for many years, but the boy's mother loved the boy very much.

One day the boy decided to test his mother. He said to himself, "Let me find out just how much my mother really loves me." In order to do this, the boy pretended to be very ill. One morning he did not rise from his bed. When his mother came to his room, he said to her, "Mother, I can't get up. I am too sick." After that he didn't eat the meals served to him for several days, though at night he arose and got some food secretly. He tried in every way to act like a sick patient

One day when his mother was visiting a neighbor, the boy went out to the chicken coop and caught a rooster.

<sup>1</sup>This is a fragmentary tekerleme, the nonsense jingle which often precedes a Turkish folktale. The tekerleme both amuses and sharpens the wits of the listener. This fragmentary tekerleme is too brief to do either.

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Taking it back to his room, he put it under a basket.<sup>2</sup>

When his mother returned, she said, "Oh, my son, what kind of sickness do you have? You should not die. Let it be I who dies instead of you, for I am old and you are still young.

"Don't enter this room, Mother! Don't come in! Az-rail has come, and he will take my life."

"No, my son! There is no one here in your room. You are mistaken. Don't die!"

"No, no, Mother! Azrail is here!"

The woman said, "Well, if that is so, where is he? Where is Azrail?"

The boy answered his mother, "He is right here under this basket. If you don't believe me, then you can lift up the basket and see for yourself."

The woman went immediately and lifted up the inverted basket. When she did this, the rooster, quite naturally, jumped out at her. Terrified, she started shouting, "I am not sick! I am not the patient. The patient is over there! He is over there!"

After the woman had come to her senses and calmed down,

<sup>2</sup>The term used here by the narrator is süt selesi.

<sup>3</sup>Azrail is the Angel of Death who comes for a person's soul at the end of his/her allotted life span.

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the boy said, "I was just joking. Let me kiss your hand."

This story teaches us that everyone thinks first of himself. It shows that no one is willing to die in place of another person. Here is another example of this truth. If a child is drowning in a pool, the mother may jump in to try to save him, but she will not jump in to die in his place.